



PHOTOGRAPHY CHANGES HOW WE IMAGINE THE PAST

Story by visitor contributor
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Carla Williams, the keeper of her family's photographs in San Francisco, California, reflects on how a photograph of her parent's party triggers both pleasant memories and introspection.

When we were children my parents and their friends used to occasionally have what they called "club" parties, convivial get-togethers that rotated from house to house. Although I longed to catch a glimpse of my parents and their friends relaxed, away from all of us kids and having a good, adult time, we were never allowed at the parties; they began after our bedtime. But after we were sent upstairs to sleep my sisters and I would lie on my oldest sister's bedroom floor, which was above the living room, with our ears pressed to a glass to try to hear the music, chatter, and laughter below. It was so maddening being able to hear the muffled sounds but never being able to see anything!

Afterward, my mother hated to wake to a messy house so she would usually have tidied up all evidence of the party before she went to bed, but on one occasion I remember creeping downstairs very early, delighted to discover that she'd been too tired to stay up to clean, planning instead to wake early to return the house back to its normal state before us girls awoke. I wandered through the living and dining rooms, inhaling the lingering scents of the cigarettes (this was the 60's), perfumes and colognes from the partygoers, spying the long-since-melted ice in those glasses etched with silly jokes (I still have one of them) that were never used at any other time.

Years later when I became the keeper of the family photographs I discovered this image of one of my parents' house parties. I recognized the very young faces of the couple in the foreground, and although this photograph was taken long before I was born, I could at last imagine a scene like the ones that used to unfold one floor beneath us, and I could see the beauty, sweetness, and love that brought those couples together and sustained their friendships, in some cases, going on sixty years. My partner and I don't get to socialize much with our friends, but when I think about it I always imagine my parents, and their house parties, and I wish we had what they did then—a commitment to enjoy each others' companies while



My Parents' Parties

we can.

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